

Thin Places
2 Corinthians 3:12-18
Luke 9:28-43a
February 14, 2010

As we come to the end of the season of Epiphany and prepare to embark on our Lenten journey this coming week, we have in Luke what I have always regarded as a strange story about Jesus. It is the story of Jesus' Transfiguration.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain with him for a time a prayer. Perhaps he needs confirmation from his Father on the task that lay ahead as He turns his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. While praying on the mountain, Jesus was joined by two figures – Moses and Elijah. Moses was the lawgiver; and Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. We don't know exactly what they said to Jesus, other than they *spoke to him of his departure* (his death), *which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*. One commentary says, "It was as if the princes of Israel's life, thought, and religion told Jesus to go on. Jesus could set out to Jerusalem... certain that what he was doing was the consummation of all the life, thought and work of His nation, and certain that [his Father] approved of the step he was taking.

During this visit from Moses and Elijah, Jesus was transfigured. It was as if his divinity showed through his humanity. Jesus had brought Peter, James and John to experience a thin place. As I mentioned in a sermon a while back, I use the term "thin places" to refer to those places, times or events in which the boundary between the spiritual and material realities becomes less opaque or more permeable. I believe Jesus' transfiguration was one of those events.

There is a question that I wish us to think about this morning, "Why does God allow us to experience the thin places, as Jesus allowed Peter, James and John to experience that time with Him?" Perhaps these are intended to be moments or events that awaken us more fully to the presence and work of Jesus in our life. Maybe they are times through which we are taught something that will help us become more useful in the Kingdom. We need to experience new and meaningful places and times because they are used by God as sources of transformation.

The truth is we approach these holy thin places more often than we may think. However, many of us don't recognize these sacramental times when we are in the midst of them. So, what kinds of mindsets can keep us from having the veil lifted so that we can both experience and comprehend the spiritual reality that we live in the midst of?

Prejudice – Being so set in our ideas that our minds are shut can keep us from experiencing the fullness of Christ in our life through new events or through the people around us.

Spiritual lethargy or sloth – When we refuse to strain ourselves spiritually we rob ourselves of growth. Avail yourselves of means of God’s grace by engaging in daily prayer, daily Bible study, worship, and the sacraments. The more you are in contact with the spiritual world, the more likely you are to recognize the thin places when you encounter them.

Being too comfortable – when we become too comfortable in our lives there is the danger of coming to the point that we rely on that comfort and not on Christ. When we place too high a priority on our comfort, then we are liable to purposefully disregard the transformative experiences that God places in our lives.

Life is also full of things which are designed to lift the veil from our eyes and awaken us to the fact that we are in the midst of something beyond the material.

Sorrow – It was said of one young singer, who was technically perfect, but sung without feeling or expression, “She will be great when something breaks her heart.” Often sorrow can awaken us to the reality around us – to the reality that we are not alone, but that God has been with us all the time. Our time of distress becomes a thin place through which we experience something of the divine – even if we experience it only as we look back on the difficulty.

Love – Giving and receiving love can awaken a life that previously seemed to have been asleep. Real love is an awakening to the horizons that we never dreamed were there.

Another thing that can awaken us to the need for a thin place is **coming to the end of ourselves**. When you are slumbering through life under your own steam, there is no need for any contact with God. But let a man come to the end of his rope – let a woman experience a problem that doesn’t seem to have a ready solution – and we begin searching for the thin places between heaven and earth. We grope in the dawning light for a handle on the One who is the source of all life.

The thin places are the spaces in which we encounter the holy in such a way that its power simultaneously forms us and bewilders us. We are formed by the power of the Spirit of God working in us as God meets us where we are and then moves us forward along our journey. At the same time, our encounter with a thin place bewilders us as we find ourselves in the presence of Almighty God. His glory comes down upon us as a wave at the ocean – it drives us under until we are completely aware that our very life’s breath is at the mercy of the force that surrounds us. It’s important that we experience this periodically, because it keeps us humble; and, our mind is refreshed with the knowledge that we are not our own source.

Only when we find ourselves peering into the face of the transfigured Christ can we hear the voice coming from heaven calling us, once again, to listen to the One who came that our life – including all of our experiences – might be redeemed.

As you embark on this journey that we in the church call Lent, I pray that you would be fully present. Look for the evidence that you are experiencing a thin place – that you are encountering the holy in the midst of the material. Search for understanding and open yourself to transformation by the Holy Spirit. And as you search, be reminded that the most profound revelation of God – who he is and what he thinks of you – was not found on the mountain, but in the cross.